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FM AMCONSUL BARCELONA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0866
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HIGH LEVEL OFFICIAL ARRESTED IN IMMIGRATION SCANDAL

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please handle appropriately.

1. (SBU) Eduard Planells, formerly the Spanish government's deputy representative to the region of Catalonia, was arrested July 16 in connection with Operation Wasp (Avispa), a Spanish National Police (SNP) operation targeting the Russian mafia. A national anticorruption court ordered the arrest of Planells and four associates. The suspects are under investigation for receiving payments from a Russian criminal organization that has been under close scrutiny by the police since 2005. court documents reportedly show Planells granted work and residence permits in exchange for cash to members of the Russian criminal network.

2. (SBU) In all, five people were arrested - Planells, Gerardo Gonzalez and Carmen Carballada from the Delegation, Victor Ambiola who reportedly was connected to the Russian Consulate (the Russian Consul General publicly denied this) and El Amin Akhazzam Boukarhak, a documents "fixer". All were charged with receiving payment from an Israeli/Georgian national named Malchas Tetrushvili who, in return, received residence permits for members of his crime gang. On July 17, the suspects were released under their own recognizance until the trial begins.

3. (SBU) Just prior to his arrest, Planells had resigned his position at the Delegation and moved to the Telecommunications Market Commission (CMT), a regulatory agency. Planells was dismissed from this position the day after he was arrested.

Operation Wasp

4. (SBU) Operation Wasp (Avispa) began in June 2005 when police arrested 28 people -- at least 22 of them closely connected with a Russian crime network. All were charged with involvement in various financial crimes including money laundering. Money from as many as 800 different bank accounts was confiscated as a result of the investigation.

Comment

5. (SBU) Planells' arrest will likely be seen as a serious breach of the immigration system. The Spanish government's "delegations" to the regions are primarily tasked with immigration matters. Joan Rangel, Delegate to Catalonia, hired Planells as his deputy, despite telling reporters he did not know him well. Tetrushvili, a shadowy figure, who has been a target of interest by the police, is reported to have been introduced to Planells by a member of the Catalan Parliament. Whether or not Planells is convicted, damage may have already been done to the integrity of the immigration system. Some will make the jump from criminals gaining access to residence permits

to the possibility that terrorists could also enjoy that same access. End Comment.

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